# A Study on ASPECT as a Grammatical Category in English
Part III

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Markedness Related to PERFECTIVE ASPECT

It is interesting to know the fact that there is a definite morphological distinction of verbs, i. e., Aorist vs. Imperfect in the indicative mood of Ancient Greek. On the basis of a binary feature analysis, the category Aorist can be characterized by the feature value [+ perfective, + past], while Imperfect can be characterized by [− perfective, + past].[1]　Judging from this fact, we can suppose the aspectual feature [± perfective] may have been decreasingly marked in one's mind and converged in the same unit of tense from [past] through the historical changes from Ancient Greek to Modern Greek. In this case it should be noted that the feature value [perfective] means an aspectual category, while the feature value [past] means a tense category.

Relating to the description of "Notional Difference between TENSE and ASPECT" in part II, the present writer will re-consider the matter of 'tense' and 'aspect' in the semantic sense. "A Unified Temporal Theory of Tense and Aspect" by Marion R. Johnson[2] is quite suggestive and profitable to get a firm picture of the relation between 'tense' and 'aspect' and lead to a better solution of the matter. Under the influence of Reichenbach's theory,[3] Johnson claims that "a complete theory of tense, aspect, and status, then, must provide a way of representing the determinacy of states of affairs that precede any given point in time, and the relative indeterminacy of states of affairs that follow it, as well as show how each category specifies a temporal point of view concerning some particular state of affairs," and that it is convenient to set up 'a set of three times,' i. e., Speech time (S), Event time (E), and Reference Time (R), pointing out the relative position of these three times in a from of the diagram as follows:
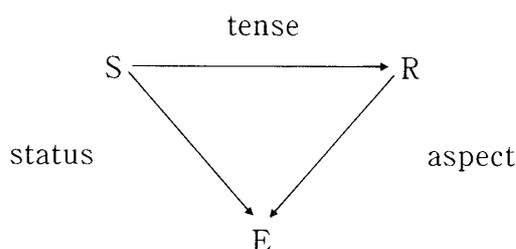
Johnson's major proposal in the thesis is that "these three times can be used to characterize the three classes of semantic categories found in the temporal inflec-

tional systems of diverse languages."[4] In this sense we can imagine a firm picture of the relationship among S, R, and E as follows: [5]

> Specifically, the categories of tense, aspect, and status correspond to the three logically possible combinations for paired relations among S, R, and E. The idea is that tense categories relate reference time to speech time, aspect categories relate event time to reference time, and status categories relate event time to speech time. In each case, one of the two times is used to provide a temporal point of view on the situation that exists at the other time. In a tense category, speech time is the point of view from which the situation at reference time is considered; in an aspect category, reference time is the point of view from which the situation at event time is considered; and in a status category, speech time is a second point of view from which the situation at event time is cosidered.

In addition, we can illustrate more precise realities of 'tense' and 'aspect' on the basis of his descriptions.

> The function of a tense category is to locate the position of the speaker's reference time, by relating it to the position of the time of speaking.[6]

> Verb aspect involves reference to one of the temporally distinct phases in the evolution of an event through time.[7]

The emphasized point in this thesis is that the definition of aspect given by Johnson is different from the one by Comrie.[8]

> This definition of verbal aspect may be usefully contrasted with that given in Comrie 1976. The latter definition proposes that "aspects are different way of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation (P. 3)." The essential difference between this definition and my own is that, according to Comrie, aspect involves only times that are INTERNAL to an event. In contrast to this, my definition involves the idea of temporally distinct PHASES of an event, which are to be understood broadly as encompassing the whole sequence of an event's evolution through time. That is, the phases of an event begin with the earliest time that the event may be taken to be a concrete reality in the projected course of events, and lasts until the latest time that the event continues to affect the shape of later events. Consequently, the phases of an event include times that are strictly earlier or later than the time of the event itself.

The way of thinking of 'aspect' as a complex reality including 'phase' like this

approach, unfortunately does not seem to be an innovation in getting a real picture of 'aspect,' since this attitude is not much different from the approach advocated in Martin Joos' *The English Verb* (1964) which we have already observed in the previous chapter of Part II.

Here we draw our attention to the conceptual confusion between 'tense' and 'aspect' described in the previous chapter of Part II, which is due to misunderstanding of Perfect Form, since we can find the trace both of 'tense marker' and of 'aspect marker' in the form. Repeating our first suggestion, i. e., it is difficult to capture the reality of Perfect Form in English only in the light of the tense system, at the same time, there is some doubt if we treat Perfect Form (have + p. p.) as the realization of English aspect, we have fairly good grounds for thinking it difficult to make clear the characteristics of Perfect Form within the framework of tense system, i. e., the categorical problem in the treatment of Present Perfect Progressive Tense, e. g., he has been seeing the picture of Mona Lisa, and of Past Perfect Progressive Tense, e. g., he had been seeing the picture of Mona Lisa. The explanation for such cases in the light of syntax will lead us to having a doubt whether each sentence has a complex tense, i. e., Present, Past, Perfect, and Progressive, though it is a possible way, in order to escape such a problem, to establish an extra category like Expanded Tense by Jespersen, or accept that Aspect is a secondary category in addition to Tense like the analysis by Leech. These periphrastic approaches to Perfect Form seem to be restricted by the principle that Perfect Form is to be captured and categorized fundamentally in the tense system in English grammar.

On the other hand, we also have fairly good grounds for thinking it difficult to capture the characteristics of Perfect Form as a whole within the framework of aspect system. We suppose Perfect Form is the unities of two grammatical elements, i. e., one of the elements of Perfect Form, HAVE, and the other element, PRETERIT PARTICIPLE, do not exactly have the same function with them. HAVE can be thought to be a certain kind of marker which indicates 'relative time reference,' while PRETERIT PARTICIPLE gives us the meaningful character of a given verb, i. e., 'perfective.'

In *The English Perfect: Tense-Choice and Pragmatic Inferences,*[9] we can find a similar suggestion to ours, "Is the perfect an aspect?" The author, McCoard refers to this matter in the volume as follows:[10]

> The English perfect has frequently been placed in the category of aspect, partly because of the persistent connection between the perfect and meanings of "completion" or "result"; but as we shall see later, these meanings are not actually intrinsic to the perfect; rather they come from an interaction with other elements of the linguistic and general pragmatic context.

Because the perfect form as a whole is not thought to be a marker of aspect, his

analysis seems to be absolutely different from that of the present writer at a glance, but in the deeper sense it is not exactly far from the writer's. The present writer does not mean to suggest that the whole unit of Perfect Form should represent 'perfective aspect,' but realize that there is a diversity of functions between HAVE and PRETERIT PARTICIPLE in the same Perfect Form.

Concerning the matter like this, the analysis of Perfect Form in view of historical changes of English will give us a useful hint, i. e., it proves that HAVE in the perfect form originally had the meaning of possession. In *An Historical Syntax of the English Language,* III, the basic meaning of HAVE + PRETERIT PARTICPLE is described by Visser as follows:[11]

> Originally *have* in colligation with a past participle was a notional verb denoting possession, while the past participle was a complement or attribute to the object and had a good deal of adjective force, *teste* its being (in the beginning) inflected in agreement with gender and number of the object: *I have my work done = I possess or have my work in a done or finished condition.* From this state as a result antecedent action was inferred, so that the colligation came to be used to denote completed action, as e.g. in: O. E. Gospels, MK. 8, 17, 'gyt ge *habbaþ eowre heortan geblende?'* In Present-Day English the word-order in independent syntactical units usually clearly indicates whether state or action is meant, so that *I have my work done* implies the former, and *I have done my work* the latter. For a long time after the Old English period, however, this difference in word-order was without this discriminative force (see Part II § 805), and the interpretation of constructions with mid-position of the object exclusively depended on situation and/or context.

Thus we can confirm that it is PRETERIT or PAST PARTICIPLE which has the ability to decide whether a given sentence has a perfective connotation. Given a familiar example in Present-Day English, we will notice that the following two sentences have distinctly different denotations:

(1) I *have* a letter *written* in English.

(2) I *have written* a letter in English.

The former (1) is generally regarded as a form of possessive constructions, while the latter (2) is taken as a form of perfect constructions. In order to make it easier to understand, we shall paraphrase the former sentence into the followings:

(1)′ I have a letter which was written in English.

(1)′ I possess a letter in a written state in English.

These paraphrased sentences illustrate a great divergence between (1) and (2), in that HAVE in the former sentence clearly has the meaning of possession. Then what kind of role does HAVE in the latter (2) play? The HAVE is a tense marker which represents the notion of the sentence (2) to come under 'present perfect,' i.e.,

"past-including-the-present."[12] In both cases, it should be noted that a certain semantic tension between the object 'a letter' and the verb in the form of PRETERIT PARTICIPLE 'written' exists, i. e., the semantic relation between the two elememts has no difference among each sentence. The object is semantically complemented with the verb in PRETERIT PARTICIPLE.

We have a good knowledge of the reality of BE-PERFECT (bēon/wesan/weorþan + Preterit Participle) in Old English, in which the use of PRETERIT PARTICIPLE with an adjectival function is limited to 'mutative verbs' or 'verbs of motion,' consequently such participles agree with the gender, number and case of the subject in a given sentence. This kind of BE-PERFECT continues up to Modern English, within the limitation to 'intransitive verbs.' The present writer, therefore, insist that the perfective meaning in English sentences should be mainly characterized with the meaning of the verb in PRETERIT PARTICIPLE. In this sense, it may well be said that BE-PERFECT is less periphrastic than HAVE-PERFECT.

If, thus, PRETERIT PARTICIPLE has a special status in that it gives the implications of perfective to a given utterance, then it is interesting to focus our attention on the prefix morpheme, 'ge-' with a historical survey on it. According to *Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Primer,* the prefix 'ge-' in Old English is defined and described as follows:[13]

> ġe- originally meant 'together', as in *ġe-fēra* 'fellow-traveller, companion' from *fēran* 'travel', or *ġe-sweostor* 'sisters'. With verbs its most distinctive function is to signify the attainment of a result by means of the action denoted by the verb: *ġe-gān* 'conquer' ('get by going') from *gān* 'go'; *ġe-winnan* 'win' ('get by fighting') from *winnan* 'fight'. It also signifies the completion of an action, or the performance of a particular single act as distinguished from the general sense of the uncompounded verb; so that *ġe-hīeran* and *ġe-sēon* mean strictly 'succeed in hearing, seeing'. But, since these verbs very commonly express particular actions, the compounded forms are much used, and come to be extended far beyond their real function. In many verbs the distinction has been altogether lost, so that, e.g., *bindan* and *ġe-bindan* are used indifferently. The prefix is generally used in past participles, where it originally gave the sense of completion. It also appears in some nouns denoting the result of an action: *ġe-worc* '(military) work', *ġe-writ* 'letter'. Sometimes it gives a causative sense to a verb, as *ġe-ān-lǣcan* 'unite'; sometimes modifies the sense in a particular way, as *ġe-faran* 'die' from *faran* 'go'. With pronouns and adverbs it gives an inclusive sense: *ġe-hwā* 'everyone' from *hwā* 'anyone', *ġe-hwǣr* 'everywhere', &c.; and cf. *ǣġ-* above.

The cited line above, "The prefix is generally used in past participles, where it originally gave the sense of completion," is a most suggestive description, on whose

grounds we can regard the prefix 'ge-' as an aspectual marker indicating the finished action denoted by verbs.

This hypothesis that the prefix 'ge-' in Old English, though the older morpheme 'ga-' in Gothic, must have had the distinctive function as an aspectual marker of perfective aspect, can trace back to the thesis, "Perfective und imperfective Aktionsart im Germanischen" by Streitberg in 1891.[14]

The theory about preverb 'ge-' founded and advocated by Streitberg and other grammarians is introduced with precise remarks by Y. Niwa in *Old English Preverbal Ge-* (in Japanese),[15] who analyzes and discusses the theory both from the diachronical point of view and from the synchronical point of view. On the other hand, Jespersen in *The Philosophy of Grammar,* standing on the negative side against admitting the existence of grammatical aspect in English, refers to Streitberg's comments on the prefix 'ga-' and points Streitberg's misleading descriptions of the morpheme as follows:[16]

> If, thus, we analyze the interesting collection of Gothic instances with the prefix *ga-* which is given by Streitberg, *Gotisches elementarbuch,* 5th ed. 1920, p.196, we shall see that "perfectivation" here means, first, finishing: ... second, change: ... third, obtaining through the action· ... On the other hand, it has some connexion with what was above, p. 159, termed object of result, as in *dig a hole* (cp. *dig the garden*), but has evidently nothing to do with time- or tense-distinctions.

Today there are a great deal of critical comments on Streitberg's theory,[17] the present writer thinks his viewpoint and suggestion to be important and meaningful, in terms of his investigation and illustration of the essentials of English Perfect in the light of the lexical meanings of verbs. Niwa (1973) concludes that the two streams are noticed in the development of the prefix 'ge-'; one stream has developed from the original meaning 'together' into various lexical meanings, the other has developed into various grammatical meanings by way of the Germanic language. Although, unfortunately, neither of the two types of development of 'ge-' has not completely been accepted nor pushed forward into the rigid grammatical system of English because of the phonological change as well as the morphological change in the English history,[18] in Present-Day English the lexical meanings attached to words survive in a large variety of forms, while the grammatical meanings have come to be expressed with the periphrasis such as Verb-Adverbial Combinations and Perfect Forms.

It should be concluded, from what has been said above, that English Perfect Form is the complex unit composed of the two semantic elements as well as composed of the two syntactic elements, i. e., one is HAVE fuctioning as a tense mark-

er, and the other is PRETERIT PARTICIPLE as an aspect marker. In other words, all these facts make it clear that it depends on the notion and function of PRETERIT PARTICIPLE whether a given sentence or utterance including Perfect Form is to have the Perfective Aspect. In addition, with reference to the results of a historical survey on the development of the prefix 'ge-' in English, it seems reasonable to conclude: concerning Perfective Aspect, the lexical meanings of verbs have the more important clue than the grammatical meanings of verbal forms.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis (Part I − III) is totally to provide an introductory analysis of the verbal aspect and related concepts, as it is declared at the beginning of Part I, with special reference to semantic interpretations on the aspectual distinctions. The notion of ASPECT which is an overt category in Slavonic such as Russian is a covert category in Modern and Present-Day English, which means that ASPECT is thought to be one of the most obscure and the least definite realities in the field of English syntax. The techinical term of ASPECT is generally defined as "a grammatical form which represents the difference in characteristics connoted by verbs" in English linguistics. Unfortunately, however, it is uncertain where the definition like this originated from in English. Thus finding out the clear and precise explanation of ASPECT in the past documents is our starting point.

In Part I and the first half of Part II, the present writer investigates a large variety of definitions and explanations of ASPECT in English grammar, through a historical survey. In the traditional grammar, George O. Curme, Etsko Kruisinga, Otto Jespersen, Hendrik Poutsma, Max Deutschbein, Henry Sweet, Reinard W. Zandvoort, and Itsuki Hosoe are the leading characters who present interesting approaches to the real picture of English ASPECT, in view of syntax and semantics; in the structural linguistics, Martin Joos, William F. Twaddell, and Akira Ota are the grammarians particularly interested in the notion of English ASPECT; in the generative grammar, Noam Chomsky and his followers give us several tentative theories in which English ASPECT is thought to be one of the main elements composing the auxiliary system; in the recent grammar: the London School surrounding Sir Randolph Quirk, Geoffrey N. Leech develops a new approach to TENSE and ASPECT in English, whose way of treating the matter is a compromise between the two categories, all the same, which is full of suggestions about the way to lead us to a better solution to the problems of English ASPECT.

Judging from the results of a historical survey on English ASPECT in Part I and the first half of Part II, the present writer indicates the existence of a notional confusion between TENSE and ASPECT even in a logical mind of English grammarians, in the second half of Part II. Considering the conceptual complexity in those categories, the present writer feels an urge to analyze ASPECT on the basis of

semantic approaches as well as syntactic approaches. In this sense, Bernard Comrie and John Lyons offer an attractive proposal for capturing the reality of ASPECT at the abstract level. Especially as Comrie suggests, we have to draw a clear distinction between PERFECTIVE and PERFECT in the semantic concept, if this is the case, PERFECT FORM in English does not necessarily represent PERFECTIVE ASPECT.

In the last part of Part II, after re-examining the typical three types of classifications of ASPECT: grammatical, contextual, and lexical, described in the previous studies of English grammar, the present writer refers to ASPECTUAL HIERARCHY in terms of semantics. It should be noted that there is a theoretical fact that the conceptual level of PERFECTIVE vs. IMPERFECTIVE differs from the conceptual level of PROGRESSIVE vs. NON-PROGRESSIVE, i. e., the former distinction is superior to the latter at the abstract level; accordingly it seems reasonable to concentrate our attention on PERFECTIVE. Here we can not be allowed to pay no attention to the relation between PERFECTIVE and PERFECT in English

Part III is, therefore, assigned to the analysis of a complicated relationship between PERFECT FORM and PEFECTIVE ASPECT, in which the present writer supposes English PERFECT FORM has a couple of markers functioning in a different way; one is HAVE behaving as a TENSE marker, and the other is PRETERIT PARTICIPLE as an ASPECT marker. In order to prove the justification in thinking of PERFECT FORM like this, the present writer diachronically observes the functional relations between HAVE and PRETERIT PARTICIPLE in the English PERFECT FORM, largely in accordance with Visser's exhausitive descriptions of the grammatical form concerned. Thus the present writer arrives at the conclusion that it is not the PERFECT FORM itself but the function of PRETERIT PARTICIPLE which allows a given sentence or utterance to have connotations of PERFECTIVE ASPECT. In other words, PERFECT FORM has to be defined as being composed of the two kinds of constituents; a TENSE marker indicating RELATIVE TIME REFERENCE which is represented by the first element HAVE, and an ASPECT marker implying PERFECTIVE or COMPLETION which depends on a large contribution of the lexical meanings of the last element PRETERIT PARTICIPLE.

From this view point one may say that the characteristics of English ASPECT are allowed to be explained from a semantic standpoint as well as from a syntactic standpoint. While there can be no doubt that the category ASPECT exists in English, there must be considerable doubt as to the justification in treating the category just within the grammatical framework. Although the present writer's approach to capturing the reality of English ASPECT can be a fragmentary analysis without exhaustive descriptions, the present writer distinguishes PERFECTIVE ASPECT from PFOGRESSIVE ASPECT which have been both considered to be in the same territory, giving priority to PERFECTIVE ASPECT as an overt category even in English, which is probably one of the universal categories among various languages

in the world. It is true that Modern or Present-Day English has no morphological varieties representing PERFECTIVE nor IMPERFECTIVE like Slavonic, but we notice the trace of PERFECTIVE ASPECT in the form of PRETERIT PARTICIPLE of verbs composing English PERFECT FORM. We may go on from this to the conclusion that PERFECTIVE ASPECT is to be regarded not only as a notional category but also as a grammatical category in English.

<div align="right">CONCLUDED.</div>

NOTES

1. This point is argued by B Comrie in *Aspect*, pp. 130-132 (1976).
2. The cited thesis by Marion R. Johnson is one of the collected papers related to ASPECT in *Tense and Aspect; Syntax and Sementics* Series, Vol. 14, pp. 145-175 (1981).
3. Hans Reichenbach, *Elements of Symbolic Logic* (1947).
4. M. R. Johnson, A Unified Temporal Theory of Tense and Aspect, in *Tense and Aspect*, p 148 (1981).
5. *Ibid.* p. 148.
6. *Ibid.* p. 151.
7. *Ibid.* p. 152.
8. *Ibid.* pp. 152-153.
9. Robert W. McCoard, *The English Perfect : Tense-Choice and Pragmatic Inferences*, pp. 6-11 (1978).
10. *Ibid.* p. 11.
11. Frederisus Th. Visser, *An Historical Syntax of the English Language*, III-2:§.2001, p. 2189 (1973).
12. R. W. McCoard, *The English Perfect*, pp. 151-152.
13. Norman Davis, *Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Primer*, p. 40 (1953)
14. On this subject, see Wilhelm Streitberg, Perfective und imperfective Aktionsart im Germanischen, *P B B*, XV, pp. 70-177 (1891).
15. Yoshinobu Niwa, *Old English Preverbal Ge-*. (*Kodai Eigo Dôshi Settôji Ge- no Kenkyû*, in Japanese: 1973).
16. Otto Jespersen, *The Philosophy of Grammar*, pp. 288-289 (1924).
17. Niwa (1973) states his opinion from the negative point of view against Streitberg's "ga-theory," indicating the inadequacy for his analysis, though Niwa appreciates his viewpoint in the historical framework.
18. For further details of the matter concerned, see Philip Scherer, Aspect in Gothic, *Language*, XXX, pp. 211-223 (1954).

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